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Galleons and naval battles with the Dutch, 1644-47 period

Sources: Printed booklet in RAH Madrid Jesuit tome 71, n° 32; translated in B&R 35: 212-275. Extracts follow.

Relation of the events on sea and land in the Philippine Islands in recent years

By Father Fray Joseph Fayol, of the Order of Mercy for the redemption of captives, chief chaplain of the royal chapel of the Incarnation of Manila.

Fortune was not born to endure... The Faith recognizes no Fortune but that of the Divine Will and providence...

Since 1638-39, when occurred the losses and wrecks of the ships that sailed to and from New Spain, and the insurrection of the Sangleys in Manila and its environs...

[Arrival of Governor Fajardo in 1644]

Such was the condition of the islands at the end of June 1644 when Don Diego Faxardo, Knight of the Order of Santiago and member of his Majesty's Council of War, who had been sent as their proprietary governor landed on the extreme point of this island of Manila after a difficult and long voyage, due either to the early beginning of the monsoon winds, or to having sailed late from Acapulco. He found the islands deficient in naval strength, since the few ships there were had been sent to Ternate to oppose the threatened invasion of the [Dutch] enemy that year. About the middle of August his Lordship made his entrance into Manila and took possession of the government; and early in September he despatched the galleons **Encarnación** and **Rosario**—which were waiting equipped and ready to sail—to New Spain.

...

[The galleons of 1645]

In July [1645], the two galleons **Encarnación** and **Rosario** arrived at the port of Lampon, on the coast opposite Manila, with abundance of aid from New Spain, carefully provided by his Majesty (whom God preserve) on account of the information received by his royal Council regarding the reinforcements that were going from Holland against these islands. With these galleons came his Lordship Don Fernando Montero de Espinosa, bishop of New Segovia and archbishop-elect of Manila... His illustrious Lordship reached the port with poor health. The land routes which they had to take in travelling from Lampon to the Lake [i.e. Laguna de Bay] and the river of Manila are very rough and steep, without any convenience or comfort of inns... When he reached the lake he became seriously ill. He would not allow them to bleed him, and on that very night he was attacked by a hemorrhage of blood, so abundant that it caused his death.

[A severe earthquake hit Manila on 13 November 1645. At the beginning of 1646, the first 5 ships of a Dutch fleet of 18 appeared off the coasts of Ilocos and Pangasinan.]

[The battles of 1646]

The news of the first squadron arrived on the first day of February. The two galleons **Encarnación** and **Rosario**, which had brought the succor from New Spain, were already in Cavite; for with special forethought and vigilance orders had been given them to stop unlading the silver that they carried, and to come to that port. Although it seemed an act of temerity for two ships to oppose so many, his Lordship—urged on by his great valor and resolution in these matters of war—after a conference and council which he summoned for this purpose, decided that the two galleons should make ready for battle. In the flagship (which was the **Encarnación**) were mounted 34 pieces of artillery, all of bronze and of the reinforced class, which variously carried balls of 30, 25, and 18 pounds. The almiranta (which was the **Rosario**) was equipped with as many as 30 pieces, of the same capacity—although, on account of the deficiency in this sort of artillery, it was necessary to dismantle some posts in the fortifications of this city and of Cavite... As commander-in-chief his Lordship appointed General Lorenzo de Orellana y Ugalde, a Vizcayan, under whose charge the ships had sailed from Acapulco... Captain Sebastian Lopez, an Andalusian, was appointed admiral, with the right of succession to the commander... The post of sergeant-major was given to Don Agustin de Cepeda, a knight of nobility and acknowledged courage...

[The first battle took place in mid-March]

Recognizing their own strength, the enemy tried to approach the almiranta, which they supposed was not so well armed, being a smaller ship. But they were received with equal valor and spirit on our side, our ships firing so often and throwing so many balls that they could not be counted. The fight lasted about five hours, and the mortality and damage were so great that all the anxiety that the heretics had felt to reach our ships

when they thought to conquer us was now directed to separating themselves from us. They anxiously awaited the night, which was now approaching, to make their cowardly escape, which they did with lights extinguished... When daybreak came, our two galleons found themselves alone, and did not know what course the enemy had taken... This was regarded as a brilliant victory, not only because of the disparity in the number of ships, but because of the little damage our side had sustained. In that battle not a man was killed, and comparatively few were wounded.

[The second battle]

Our squadron took some rest at the port of Bolinao, and while there it received orders to sail to the Embocadero and there await and escort the galleon **San Luis** which was expected from New Spain. Our ships set sail, and, after encountering many calms and headwinds, made port on the first of June, at the island of Ticao, within sight of the Embocadero...

The Dutch made their appearance there on 22 June [1646], when one of our sentinels reported 7 ships, which were heading toward the port in which our two galleons were anchored. With gallant resolution, our commander immediately gave orders to weigh anchor and go out to meet them; but afterward... it was decided that it would be more proper to let the enemy waste [their powder], and not to engage in battle with them until the galleon should arrive from New Spain with succor, for which they were waiting, or until it should make some other port in safety.

[The Dutch blockaded the port with their 7 ships and 16 launches. After 31 days of feigning attack, some Spanish prisoners fled the Dutch ships and reported on their strength and plans.]

This information was of no little importance, and threw light upon what should be done. On 21 July, our commander, considering that it was now time for the ship **San Luis**, which was expected from New Spain, to have made port in some one of the many harbors that these islands contain, decided to set sail at dawn on the 25th, the day of the glorious apostle Santiago [i.e. St. James], to cannonade the enemy in the midst of his fleet, and to challenge him to battle... The squadron weighed anchor and took the route for Manila...

At daybreak of the 29th, we discovered all seven of their ships together, who were coming from the windward side to look for us. At midday, they halted, and again they tacked in another direction, until 5 p.m. when our commander, unable to endure such delay, challenged them to battle by firing a cannon.

Apparently they did not wish to fight by day, but thought the night more suitable for their design, which was to send their two fireships against our galleons. At that time, the nights were very clear and calm, and the moon shone brightly. They waited, then, until sunset; and about 7 p.m., between Banton and Marinduque [Islands], they came down with an east wind ahead of our flagship, and surrounded it, the fearful multitude of their artillery filling it [with balls]. Our flagship also did its duty, responding to them as they deserved. Our almiranta followed in its wake firing the artillery at its prow, and

inflicting much damage on the ships that were fighting astern of our flagship. The enemy's flagship came up with ours, to the sound of loud clarions and trumpets, and well garnished with lanterns of various sizes, all lighted. Its sails were so trimmed as to let it go no faster than our flagship, as arrogantly as if they had already conquered us. It came so near that our men heard distinctly the noise made when our balls hit the side of the enemy's ship. From both sides there was an incessant fire of both artillery and musketry, from the maintops, forecastles, and poops. In both the Dutch and the Spanish ships were seen heaps of cannon balls, cylinders, and cross-bar shots, which caused great destruction of masts, yards, and rigging, and even damaged the sides of the vessels.

The battles went on, as keenly and fiercely as might be expected from our persistent valor and the great strength of the enemy. At the height of the battle our flagship, undertaking to bear down upon two ships that were hard pressed, found itself entangled with their almiranta, and this was the greatest danger that had arisen, on account of the ease with which the enemy could then work havoc among our men. The brave seamen came to the rescue, cutting the ropes and separating the galleons, with great courage and promptness. Meanwhile, our artillery and musketry kept up an incessant fire on the enemy's sides, which were unprotected—displaying as much dexterity and order in their firing as they could have done if the galleons were apart. It pleased God, through the agency of His glorious mother, that the ships should quickly separate.

Then one of their fireships approached our flagship; but our artillery checked this rash boldness, hurling at the fireship terrible volleys on the starboard quarter until it came under the stern-gallery of our flagship. Then our commander gave orders to attack it with the stern-chasers, which pierced the enemy from side to side, and with such volleys of musketry that the heretics became demoralized and retired toward our almiranta, which received the fireship with a volley from 10 guns at once, so opportunely that its destruction was completed; for its fireworks being thus kindled, it was sent to the bottom. Soon came the launch from our flagship—which our commander, with military foresight, had equipped with musketeers and seamen, to hinder the fireships—and picked up a Dutchman, the only one left alive. This man informed us of the enemy's plans, and of their signals, and said that they had another fireship—his statements entirely agreeing with those of the captives already mentioned.

This fierce and stubborn battle lasted from 7 p.m. until daybreak, without the loss of a single man on our flagship, and only 2 wounded; the almiranta did not lose over 5 men killed. This must be one of the most unusual records known in naval warfare; it was a favor, evident beyond doubt, from God and His mother, who protect the Catholic power in these islands, on account of its importance to the propagation of His holy Faith. The damage sustained by the heretics was well understood from the care with which they began to retreat as soon as daylight came. The whole day was spent by both sides in cleaning and repairing their vessels; but the enemy continued to retreat...

[The third battle]

Two days later, on 31 July—a day consecrated to the glorious patriarch St. Ignatius de Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus—our commander... finding that he was sailing with a north wind, to windward of the enemy... ordered all sails to be spread, and started in pursuit of the enemy. He soon overtook the Dutch ships between the islands of Maese de Campo and Mindoro. At 2 p.m. on the same day, he courageously forced our two galleons among the six vessels of the enemy, and another horrible battle was fought. The artillery was all fired as often and as skilfully as musketry could have been used. The enemy attacked our almiranta, but it defended itself and assailed the enemy so bravely that it inspired fear and astonishment...

Throughout the afternoon, the fight continued with the same obstinacy and vigor, with the determination on our part not to stop until we should reduce the enemy's ships to splinters, or send them to the bottom...

The heretics made their last effort by attempting to send close to our flagship their second fireship, which was large enough to carry 30 cannon; it was escorted by two other ships and towed by some launches. Our commander, as one so experienced in military affairs, ordered the musketeers to fire on the men who were directing the launches, and at the same time, the artillery on the starboard from which the fireship was coming, to fire at its sides; the guns on the lookout and the poop were fired with such effect that the vessel quickly sank in sight of all, listing to port and going down bow first. The heretics were so badly beaten and cowed that, spreading all their canvas, they basely fled toward the land. Our squadron followed in pursuit, but as night was approaching, and there was a squally wind from the northwest, accompanied by thunder and lightning, the enemy escaped by spreading their canvas aft and extinguishing their lights...

The losses on our side were as insignificant in this as in the previous battle...

The Governor and Captain-general, Don Diego Faxardo, was informed of all this; and by his orders our fleet retired to the port of Cavite in the latter part of August, after a 6-month voyage, in such a need of repairs as can well be imagined from the foregoing account of the three battles.

[The newly-built galleon San Diego and the final battle of 1646]

About this time the galleon **San Diego**, recently built, sailed from this port for New Spain... Our galleon, having left the port, found itself, while still in sight of Mariveles near an islet called Fortun, at nightfall near a Dutch ship, one of three that were in that quarter; these were part of the third squadron, which had come to join the 12 ships of the two squadrons before-mentioned... **Our galleon carried her guns on the ballast and the various decks were littered with boxes and utensils, as is usually the case when one of those ships sails on such a long voyage.** The enemy recognized, at once, that our vessel was not a warship and attacked it furiously. They approached so close that the conversation of various persons could be heard, but they did not venture to board the galleon; for General Christoval Marquez de Valenzuela, commander of

the galleon, a brave and experienced soldier, hurriedly disencumbered five iron cannon, and, bringing them to bear on the enemy, stood on the defensive. That action was sufficient to secure his retreat toward Mariveles; entering the bay, with the loss of a few killed, he arrived at the port of Cavite and made a report of the occurrence.

This new accident did not depress the brave heart of his Lordship; he ordered that the two strong galleons should be immediately prepared to go out again, in convoy of this third one... On this second occasion, he appointed Admiral Sebastian Lopez commander-in-chief of the fleet, and Sergeant-Major Don Agustin de Cepeda admiral... An excellent galley was also equipped with a cannon amidships, carrying a 35-pound ball, and small culverins carrying 14-pound balls; it contained an infantry company of 100 picked men... The galley was also accompanied by 4 brigantines of good capacity, well equipped with musketry, and each carrying a cannon at the prow.

...

On 15 September, the three galleons **Encarnación**, **Rosario** and **San Diego** sailed from the harbor of Cavite, accompanied by the fleet of oared vessels formed by the galley and the four brigantines aforesaid. Continuing their voyage, they arrived at Fortun and saw, toward a point called Calavite, on the island of Mindoro, three of the enemy's ships under sail. Our brave commander was glad of the opportunity and at once invited them to fight by firing a cannon.

[A fight ensued in which the almiranta found herself in the middle of the three Dutch ships, doing considerable damage to them.]

As soon as the sun rose, our flagship bore down upon the enemy and offered fight. But the foe, who had more need of repairs than desire to fight again, put in at a place near Calavite point whence he had sailed, among some shoals where our galleys could not follow.

Our commander then decided to continue the voyage, to furnish an escort for the galleon **San Diego**. But, as it was recently-built vessel, and had not yet been tested, it was soon discovered that it did not answer the helm, or carry its sails well. Also, as the monsoon winds had ended and the north winds prevailed, which are unfavorable for a voyage to New Spain, General Sebastian Lopez, in accordance with the opinion of a council called for this purpose, decided that the galleon **San Diego** should put in at Mariveles, and remain there until his Lordship could be informed of the matter and despatch new orders.

[Just then, as the three Spanish ships were separated, the three Dutch ships attacked the flagship but lost the gun battle that lasted 4 hours. The galley came up and was attacked the stern of the Dutch flagship, but the wind came up and she escaped.]

On this occasion, although the enemy's flagship was supported by a ship on each side, and all of them were firing terrible volleys at once, not a single person was killed on our galley, which seems a miracle...

Accordingly to the estimate made by well informed persons, although we fired, in these battles, over 2,000 cannon-shots, and the enemy over 5,000, we had only 14 men killed, and comparatively few wounded; while the enemy, besides the vessels which we

sank, arrived at their forts so damaged, and had lost so many men, that for many a year they will remember the two stout Manila galleons.

[What had happened to the galleon San Luis coming from Acapulco in 1646]

The galleon **San Luis**, commanded by General Fernando Lopez Perona, left Acapulco late in the season and encountered the monsoon winds so prevalent in these islands that, before land was sighted, it passed through fierce tempests, lost its masts, and finally made the unlucky port of Cagayan. There, driven by the currents, it struck on the rocks and was torn open at the keel—not before, however, the commander had placed in safety the men, and the registered silver (which is the most essential part of the succor sent), and afterward removed the artillery. Nevertheless, the loss is great, owing to the lack of vessels on these islands at present, the many failures suffered by businessmen, and the lawsuits to which such disasters give rise. It cost no less than the life of the commander, who died in this same city of Cagayan a few days after his arrival—giving up his life, as a proof of his honorable devotion and of his zeal in fulfilling his duties in the service of the king and the welfare of the colony.

...

[The newly-built galleon Nuestra Señora de Guía sent to Acapulco in 1647]

In the council which was called for the despatch of the relief ships from New Spain, opinions agreed that, for this year, only one vessel should sail; and order was given that the building of another ship should be completed as speedily as possible in the shipyard in the island of Leyte; and that in the port of Cavite the galleons, galleys, and other vessels there should be repaired.¹

[The Battle of Cavite, 12 June 1647]

[In June, a Dutch fleet of 12 ships arrived and attacked Cavite. The Spanish, with 11 ships went out and a battle (similar to that which was to happen there in 1898) took place. The Dutch flagship had a capacity of 700 tons, and carried 48 cannon, in two tiers of 12 on each side; it was heavily damaged in the initial engagement.]²

Our galleon **San Diego**, which carried the colors as flagship and faced the enemy,³ received over 200 cannon-shots, but not one penetrated her hull, and only 2 men were killed—one a Spaniard, on the poop; and the other an Indian, in the ship's waist.

[The town of Cavite was bombarded heavily as well.] Notwithstanding, there was not in any house, convent, or church a single person killed or wounded; and the entire number of killed and injured in all the vessels and military posts during this engagement, did not exceed 5 Spaniards and 4 Indians killed, and 8 Spaniards and 1 Indian

1 Ed. note: One of the galleons was the **San Andrés** commanded by Captain Lope de Colindres.

2 Ed. note: Three other ships were of 800 tons, the rest between 300 and 400 tons, and the pataches from 60 to 100 tons. Among the 48 cannon of the flagship, 18 were bronze (firing balls up to 36 pounds), the rest iron (balls up to 15 pounds).

3 Ed. note: She was under the command of Don Andrés Azcueta.

wounded, who all together did not equal the number of killed on the enemy's flagship alone.

...

It was considered a special favor from Heaven that at the height of the conflict, when all the enemy's ships were off Cavite, one of our pataches, in command of Admiral Luis Alonso de Roa, which was returning from the kingdom of Camboja—where Don Luis had gone as an envoy, in regard to establishing there a plant for building ships, and conveying to it provisions and other supplies—entered the [Manila] bay through the smaller channel of Mariveles, and reached a place of safety.

[The Dutch then landed troops for food and to pillage several inhabited places on the Bataan Peninsula. They captured the fortified church at Abucay, after the coward Spanish mayor prevented the Pampango defenders (veterans of the Ternate wars) from attacking the Dutch first; in that, the Dominican Fathers, who had sided with the mayor, did receive some of the blame. In the end, when they ran out of powder, nearly 200 Pampango soldiers were put to death, while the mayor and the religious were made prisoners. The reason why the Dutch captured Abucay was because informants had told them that the silver from a Chinese ship that had run aground had been buried there; this treasure, worth about 20,000 pesos, was carried off by the Dutch, after they set fire to the church and convent, but not to the village. The Dutch also attacked the village of Samal, but this time they were met on the beach and forced to retreat. On 11 July, the Dutch returned to Abucay to pillage the village and steal food; this time they were attacked by Spanish troops who killed at least 14 Dutch and captured 2 of them. The Dutch prisoners gave a full report about the Dutch fleet, which had been despatched from Jakarta by Governor Cornelis van der Lyn and was under the command of General Martin Gercen [Gertzen?], a Frisian by birth.]

Their flagship left Batavia with 220 men, all white, of various European nations, unmixed with men from any of the peoples of those regions...

Our fleet at present is composed of 3 large galleons and 1 of medium size, 2 pataches, and 2 galleys, with other oared vessels of less size. All hands are at work on it, without any cessation...

Printed with permission, at Manila, in the printing-house of the Society of Jesus, in the year 1647.¹

1 Ed. note: The fact that this booklet was printed by Jesuits explains its presence among the Jesuit tomes in RAH Madrid, although the author was not a Jesuit.